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THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council Resolution 1996/31.

[29 December 1998]

GE.99-10516 (EXT)

Realization of the right to development

1. "Fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is an urgency to implement the right to development", affirmed the experts of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on the Right to Development in their report (E/CN4/1998/29). That urgency stems from the fact that while "the globalization of the world economy and the increasing pre-eminence of market rules have provided new opportunities, but also new risks, in the efforts to achieve development, [t]here is a risk of marginalization of countries, groups and individuals that are unable to compete."

2. The movements that form the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC), for their part, recognize the same urgency of the exercise of the right to development. Their delegates, meeting at the World General Assembly in October and November 1998, analysed the current situation of peasant farmers and rural inhabitants in their various countries. They noted that the situation is increasingly appalling and that globalization of the economy, in addition to the other disasters - not all of them natural - is instrumental in marginalizing an increasingly broad segment of rural populations worldwide and relegating them to a situation of even greater instablility].

3. Their analysis of the neo-liberal economic system leads them to emphasize that it is a system that is imposed worldwide, whatever the latitude and whatever the nuances so eagerly sought between one continent and another. This system always seeks maximum profit for an ever-dwindling minority.

4. The many tangible adverse effects include expropriation of land; control of international trade dominated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the expense of local commerce and small-scale producers; growing numbers of outcasts and unemployed in rural areas; increase in permanent and seasonal work-related migration; conflicts and wars used by a minority to control, and even destroy, natural resources such as land, water and forests.

5. In addition to their economic function, the transnational corporations, which bear much of the responsibility for squandering the planet's natural resources, play an increasingly decisive role in State policy. They use international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to impose structural adjustment policies, or even WTO to impose regional market conditions (MERCOSUR, ALENA, CAP and the Lomé Conventions among others).

6. Political power, thus dominated by economic power, has lost its freedom to direct the policies that could meet the populations' needs. The UNDP studies contained in the 1998 World Human Development Report inform us that over one billion people are not in a position to satisfy their most basic needs.

7. The dominant economic system encourages greater concentration of land. It relies on industrial agriculture that is increasingly chemical and on an array of genetic manipulations (seeds and animals). This erodes the right of peoples to feed themselves and their nutritional sovereignty, denying them access to land and the right to independent control of the production, processing and marketing of their food products.

8. The market economy penalizes the most fragile countries by destroying their local and national trade structures through the interplay of exports-imports. It promotes excessive consumption of non-essential goods, plunging low-income families into debt. It destroys the value systems and the very culture of peoples, especially indigenous communities, and demolishes the very foundations of democracy and community.

9. The advance of the new technologies opens up an immense field for the appetites of companies over-eager for potential profits and indifferent to the development and rights of the populations concerned. Thus, the patents deposited by pharmaceutical or agribusiness firms seeking to appropriate the local population's traditional lore and knowledge about medicines or seeds are a direct infringement of the right to intellectual property.

10. Perpetually bealeaguered by this economic model, the rural movements proffer another vision of economics and development:

a) For them, human beings must be, far and above any commercial considerations, the subject of development and, therefore, also its main actor and beneficiary;

b) Also deserving of priority is the sort of development that respects people's "cohabitation" in harmony with the environment, as is development in which men and women, equal before the law, work together in the service of the local community and the human community as a whole.

c) The autochthonous peoples' struggle for recognition of their own identities and the resolve to promote an active role for women in economic, political, social and cultural organizations are also urgent requirements for attaining harmonious development;

d) Respect for human rights perceived as a whole (civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights) is a prerequisite to the attainment of genuine development.

11. States have a responsibility to ensure the realization of the right to development. This is why, in accordance with the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on the Right to Development, the FIMARC movements call upon the States to:

a) Adopt economic and social measures in order to avoid the exclusion of groups marginalized by extreme poverty, which directly denies the right to development.

b) Ensure not only that the poorer and more vulnerable groups, including landless peasants, the autochthonous population and the unemployed, have access to means of production such as land and credit, but that they are assured of the right to work and the right to means of subsistence and to a reasonable income as a fundamental right.

c) To ensure that the vulnerable sectors and the associations representing the public interest (such as consumer groups, workers' organizations, environmental and human rights protection agencies, and women's

organizations) are allowed to play an active role and defend their interests in the places and bodies in which decisions concerning them are taken; for example, when a local or national budget is being prepared or when economic and social policy is being evolved).

12. In conclusion, the FIMARC movements unconditionally support the Intergovernmental Group's proposal to establish a follow-up mechanism to perform the following functions:

a) Review the progress made in the implementation of the right to development and to provide specific recommendations thereon;

b) Examine World Bank, IMF and WTO activities relevant to the implementation of the right to development, and

c) Submit to the Commission on Human Rights an annual report containing its conclusions and suggestions.

13. In view of their perplexing situation, rural inhabitants await with growing impatience the initial findings of the working group for the establishment of a follow-up mechanism, as decided unanimously by the Commission on Human Rights in resolution 1998/72 on the right to development.

14. This decision is, in fact, an initial response to the concerns expressed at the recent World General Assembly of rural movements which established provisions and commitments for the coming years "for harmonious and sustainable development worthy of humankind today and a source of hope for future generations".